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Unsung Hero:

ADNAN AL ABOUDI

AND THE LANDMINE SURVIVORS NETWORK OF JORDAN

Since a life-altering car accident left him permanently disabled in 1989, Adnan Al Aboudi has dedicated his life and career to victim assistance in mine action. Al Aboudi, along with his organization, Landmine Survivors Network–Jordan,¹ has developed a unique, humanistic approach to mine action. They focus on psychological as well as physical recovery for disabled victims of explosive remnants of war. Through his hard work and perseverance, Al Aboudi has raised national and international awareness of the importance of victim assistance in mine action.

by Leah Young [Mine Action Information Center]

Adnan Al Aboudi and his organization, Landmine Survivors Network–Jordan, have changed the idea of mine action in Jordan forever. They created one of the first mine-action programs in Jordan to focus on the importance of implementing victim-assistance programs, rather than mine clearance and mine-risk education. This unique program focuses on aiding and supporting persons with disabilities. Al Aboudi has experienced first-hand what it is like to be a disabled person in Jordan. In 1989, Al Aboudi suffered a double amputation as a result of a car accident, losing one leg below the knee and the other leg above the knee. Since that point, he has been actively involved in providing assistance, advocacy and support to disabled survivors, and in 1999 he became the Director of the newly established Landmine Survivors Network–Jordan.

Jordan and LSN's Work

Jordan is not unfamiliar with mine-action programs. In fact, when LSN–Jordan was established, a strong awareness of the issue already existed, along with many established mine-action organizations. LSN initially began as an MRE program, of which Jordan had a multitude, but with Al Aboudi's guidance, they discovered a new and unique vision. "We became the first organization that promoted ... victim-assistance programs [at the] survivor level. We linked all local



Adnan Al Aboudi.
PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANA HADDADIN

partners who represent nongovernmental organizations, governments and militaries to enhance the mine-action programs nationally," says Al Aboudi.

They started in this new direction by creating literature and educational tools to aid victims. For instance, they distributed a pamphlet throughout Jordan entitled "Surviving Limb Loss," which was published in Arabic and translated into other languages. LSN now strives to "address the whole person on the journey from injury to recovery." They achieve this goal by focusing on improving the health of survivors through counseling, aiding survivors in becoming economically independent and empowering survivors to promote their own rights as well as the rights of other disabled persons.

A Positive Approach

According to Al Aboudi, peer-support programs are one of the crucial aspects of victim assistance. Programs such as these are what initially caused him

to get involved in mine action. Al Aboudi and LSN believe that peer support is essential to a survivor's complete recovery. "I tried, since my injury date in July 1989, to visit new injured survivors to educate them about amputation issues and support them psychologically," says Al Aboudi.

Since then, Al Aboudi has been actively involved in promoting victim-assistance programs. He has been active in more than just medical assistance—he also has incorporated hospital visitation and peer support to aid victims on emotional and psychological levels, which are oftentimes overlooked in traditional victim-assistance programs. This emphasis on psychological recovery is reflected in LSN's work as well.

Al Aboudi promotes the belief that survivors with disabilities need to "focus on their abilities as opposed to their disabilities." He lives this belief in his own life through his passion for and participation in sports, despite being a double amputee. Some of his favorite sporting activities include swimming, water skiing and discus throwing. He participated in the 1996 Paralympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia, achieving the seventh highest world record in discus throwing. He also went on to compete in the British World Championship in 1998. He has translated this passion for sports into LSN's program in Jordan. LSN has worked locally to incorporate landmine survivors and those with disabilities into Jordan's athletic programs. This network of disabled athletes partnered with the Jordan Sports Federation in 2004 to create a national program for athletes with disabilities. This partnership led to Jordan's "first national amputee sitting volleyball team."²

Making a Difference

LSN and Al Aboudi also emphasize the importance of empowering disabled individuals to be advocates for themselves as well as their peers by encouraging them to influence and change issues specifically affecting them as disabled persons. LSN strives to raise awareness and "let survivors' voices be heard" by participating in and speaking at events throughout Jordan. Al Aboudi teaches survivors to be advocates for their peers and to promote the implementation of more victim-assistance programs in Jordan.

Al Aboudi's contributions are not limited to Jordan; he has also been an advocate for the rights of the disabled on an international level. He presses for the recognition of victim assistance as a human-rights issue in the international sphere. He is constantly working to ensure the rights of the disabled within the Middle East by participating in the International Disability Caucus. Al Aboudi was also selected to join the Working Group of the U.N. Ad Hoc Committee³ as a representative of the Arab community. This group, comprised of delegates from 27 nations and 12 NGOs, formulated the text for the U.N. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. The United Nations adopted the document in 2006, which is now in the process of being signed and ratified by member states.⁴

The contributions of Al Aboudi and LSN have greatly affected mine action in Jordan as well as on an international level. In Jordan he has promoted victim-assistance and peer-support programs—before Al Aboudi and LSN, victim-assistance programs were not a part of mine action in this region, and there were no programs that focused on every aspect of the individual, including the socioeconomic and psychological levels of recovery. Due to his tireless efforts, however, victim assistance has been incorporated into the programs of many mine-action organizations in Jordan.

A New Kind of Future

Al Aboudi believes that more strategic approaches are necessary to improve the quality of and avoid redundancies in mine-action programs. By introducing his new approach to victim assistance through LSN-Jordan, he has lived up to these words. Al Aboudi says that he strives to be an advocate for creating a world that is "victim free" and "barrier free" for survivors and other disabled persons, starting with himself. ♦

See Endnotes, page 112

For additional references for this article, see <http://tinyurl.com/6k47to>.



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